

Why Fiber?



Dietary fiber, also known as roughage or bulk, includes all parts of plant foods that your body can't digest or absorb. Unlike other food components such as fats, proteins or carbohydrates — which your body breaks down and absorbs — fiber isn't digested by your body. Therefore, it passes relatively intact through your stomach, small intestine, colon and out of your body. It might seem like fiber doesn't do much, but it has several important roles in maintaining health. Fiber is commonly classified into two categories: those that don't dissolve in water (insoluble fiber) and those that do (soluble fiber).

Insoluble fiber promotes the movement of material through your digestive system and increases stool bulk, so it can be of benefit to those who struggle with constipation or irregular stools. Whole-wheat flour, wheat bran, nuts and many vegetables are good sources of insoluble fiber.

Soluble fiber dissolves in water to form a gel-like material. It can help lower blood cholesterol and glucose levels. Soluble fiber is found in oats, peas, beans, apples, citrus fruits, carrots, barley and psyllium.

Benefits of a high-fiber diet:

- **Normalizes bowel movements.** Dietary fiber increases the weight and size of your stool and softens it. A bulky stool is easier to pass, decreasing your chance of constipation. If you have loose, watery stools, fiber may also help to solidify the stool because it absorbs water and adds bulk to stool. For some, fiber may provide relief from irritable bowel syndrome.
- **Helps maintain bowel integrity and health.** A high-fiber diet may lower your risk of developing hemorrhoids, and small pouches in your colon (diverticular disease). Some fiber is fermented in the colon. Researchers are looking at how this may play a role in preventing diseases of the colon.
- **Lowers blood cholesterol levels.** Soluble fiber found in beans, oats, flaxseed and oat bran may help lower total blood cholesterol levels by lowering low-density lipoprotein, or "bad," cholesterol levels. Epidemiologic studies have shown that increased fiber in the diet can reduce blood pressure and inflammation, which is also protective to heart health.
- **Helps control blood sugar levels.** Fiber, particularly soluble fiber, can slow the absorption of sugar, which for people with diabetes can help improve blood sugar levels. A diet that includes insoluble fiber has been associated with a reduced risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- **Aids in weight loss.** High-fiber foods generally require more chewing time, which gives your body time to register when you're no longer hungry, so you're less likely to overeat. Also, a high-fiber diet tends to make a meal feel larger and linger longer, so you stay full for a greater amount of time. And high-fiber diets also tend to be less "energy dense," which means they have fewer calories for the same volume of food.
- **Uncertain effect on colorectal cancer.** Evidence that dietary fiber reduces colorectal cancer is mixed — some studies show benefit, some show nothing and some suggest increased risk. If you're concerned about preventing colorectal cancer, adopt or stick with a colon cancer screening regimen. Regular testing for and removal of colon polyps can prevent colon cancer.

Daily Fiber Recommendations

Under age 50:	Men = 38 g/day	Women = 25 g/day
Age 50 or older:	Men = 30 g/day	Women = 21 g/day



Delicious Ways to Boost Fiber Intake

-- By Christine Seymour, Health & Fitness Writer

Replace your white bread with whole wheat bread.

Many breads are packed with fiber—after all, just ½ cup of whole wheat flour packs more than 7 grams. Look for the words "whole wheat" at the top of the ingredients list, but remember to read those nutritional labels carefully. Just because a loaf of bread claims to be "whole grain" or "wheat" doesn't mean it includes a healthy dose of fiber in the package. Many of those eye-catching labels will reveal only 1 gram of dietary fiber, meaning that the bread is made mostly from white flour, not whole wheat.

Leave the sugary cereals on the shelves.

Whole grain cereals and bran flakes are usually jam-packed with fiber—about 5 grams in one ¾ cup serving! Fiber One cereal by General Mills is a great choice, packing 14 grams of fiber in each serving! If you're having a hard time swallowing these healthier varieties, try adding a little sweetness with fresh fruit, vanilla soy milk, a touch of honey, or a sugar-free sweetener.

Pass the beans, please.

Beans and legumes are always a healthy choice, usually containing 6-7 grams of fiber per ½ cup serving (cooked). Plus, you can easily add them to just about any meal. Heated as a side, in soups or chili, added to salads, or in place of meat in a main dish, beans have a healthy combination of fiber, protein, and healthy fat that keeps you feeling fuller longer.

Sweeten with fruit; add volume with vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are notorious "diet" foods, but should be must-eat staples of everyone's diet. These tasty wonders are high in volume, low in calories, and high in fiber—a great combination for any dieter who wants to fill up without breaking his calorie budget. One cup of fresh red raspberries holds a whopping 8 grams of fiber and blackberries are close behind at about 7.5 grams.

Pears, prunes, and apples all measure up at about 4 grams of fiber per serving.

Vegetables are a little lower on the totem pole for fiber, but still a great source. Acorn squash (1/2 cup baked) and artichoke hearts (1/2 cup cooked) provide about 4.5 grams of fiber, and a baked potato (with the skin) comes in at just fewer than 4 grams. Get 2 grams of fiber in a serving of broccoli, asparagus, cabbage, carrots, green beans, spinach, lettuce, or tomatoes.

More Fiber-Rich Tips

- Choose fresh fruit and/or vegetables over juice.
- To get more fiber and nutrients, eat the skin of cleaned fruits and vegetables.
- Include bran and whole grain breads daily.
- Drink more water to accommodate your increased fiber intake to reduce indigestion.
- Eat less processed foods and more whole foods.
- Try to meet your fiber requirements with foods rather than supplements.
- A large increase in fiber over a short period of time could result in bloating, diarrhea, gas, and all-around discomfort. It is better to add fiber to your diet gradually over a recommended period of about three weeks, to avoid abdominal problems.

Source: http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/nutrition_articles.asp?id=442